

Approved For Release 2006/01/10 : CIA-RDP78S02149R000100270003-8

I. The Manpower Drain in North Vietnam

A reconsideration of the manpower problem in North Vietnam reinforces previous estimates that the problem is qualitative rather than quantitative. In some respects the strain on manpower drain may actually have lessened during 1966. The full commitment of labor to repairing and building lines of communication may possibly have declined by from 15-30 percent below the end of 1965 levels.

Construction workers permanently assigned to repair and maintenance of LOC's were estimated at 70-100,000 at the end of 1965. We now estimate that as a consequence of the increased productivity resulting from the expertise acquired since the start of the bombings, and the completion of alternate networks and bridge crossing, 60,000 - 70,000 in North Vietnam and 20,000 - 25,000 in Laos.

The fact that a large share of imports flowing into North Vietnam are for the development or improvement of industrial facilities suggests that there are adequate reserves of skilled manpower and other essential inputs to develop new industrial plant or to convert existing plant to a war-supporting role. Recently announced data on the school population and higher education programs also indicate that manpower requirements have not handicapped the regime's educational policies.

With almost two years experience in coping with the effects of the Rolling Thunder program and with the build-up of its military forces probably leveling off, the quantitative drain on North Vietnam's manpower has probably reached its peak. The major drawings on manpower resources during the coming year will be those caused by the casualties

NSA review completed

ARMY review(s) completed.

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of the air and ground wars. The total of these casualties, based on 1966 experience, will probably not exceed 75,000-80,000 persons in 1967. This will men, however, the continuing commitment of over 50 percent of the annual increment of the North Vietnamese physically fit males reaching draft age. Although this is substantially less than the military conscription of at least 80 percent of this group during 1965 and 1966, it is still an onerous qualitative burden for a nation to bear.

II. The Manpower Drain in South Vietnam

A. The Build-up of Communist Forces

During the second half of 1966 the South Vietnamese War continued to become increasingly expensive for all participants. Allied deployments increased according to plan, and the Communist forces (primarily, VCMF/PAVN) apparently attempted, and may in fact have achieved parity with the Allied build-up. Communist casualties increased slightly during the latter part of 1966, whereas Allied casualties were down slightly from those losses suffered during the first six months of this year. In spite of the growing casualty lists it is significant to note that the Communist soldier still shows an ability to satisfactorily perform his duties in combat. Furthermore, in a relative sense enemy troops are currently being captured and defecting at rates essentially equal to those observed in 1965.

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B. Communist Forces

Current estimates of the number of Communist forces stationed in South Vietnam vary considerably depending on the methodology used to derive a confirmed enemy order of battle. USMACV estimates contain an inherent 3-month lag. Consequently, the conservative USMACV estimate of confirmed enemy strength in South Vietnam is considered to be the minimum number of Communist troops in South Vietnam. (See Table 1.)

Table 1

Enemy Troop Deployment South Vietnam
1964-1966

	(in thousands)*		
	1964	1965	1966
PAVN	2.5	26.1	44.9
WCMF	44.8	56.9	61.6
Irregulars	91.8-200.0**	110.0-300.0	110.0-300.0
Total	<u>139.1-247.3</u>	<u>193.0-383.0</u>	<u>216.5-406.5</u>

* End of year totals with the exception of 10 Dec 1966. All figures from USMACV except when noted.

** Independent CIA/OCI estimate.

C. Comparative VC/NVA and Allied Maneuver Battalion Strength by Corps Area

Analysis of current MACV estimate would indicate that in a relative sense the Allies have put more men into each Corps Area than the enemy in the last 6 months. The estimated build-up of confirmed

VC/NVA units would seem, indeed, to indicate that the Communists are finding it increasingly difficult to expand their main forces.

Thus through early December the VC/NVA main forces had expanded by only 23.5 thousand troops for a total of 106.5 thousand, including 45,000 NVA troops. We have previously estimated that the VC/NVA main force by the end of 1966 would be 125,000 including 60,000 NVA.

When the final returns are in on both MACV's confirmed order of battle and the level of confirmed infiltration, it is apparent that the enemy's main force strength will be considerably higher than presently estimated. If this be the case, the enemy, despite increasing manpower losses, has succeeded with the possible exception of IV Corps in maintaining his relative strength compared to that of the Allied forces.

D. Manpower Losses

The comparison of estimated enemy losses shown in Table 2, indicates an increase of over 50 percent in 1966 compared to 1965.

Table 2

South Vietnam: Estimate of Enemy Losses

	1965	1966
KIA	35,400	56,000
Captured	6,300	9,800
"Chieu Hoi" Military Returnees	9,500	12,000
TOTAL	50,800	77,800
Seriously wounded	19,000-30,000	30,000-47,000
Deserters	9,500	12,000
GRAND TOTALS	<u>79,300-90,300</u>	<u>119,800-136,000</u>

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The increasing rates of attrition of Communist forces, caused primarily by the increased level of combat, have forced the North Vietnamese to shoulder an increasing share of the manpower burden. We estimate that in 1965 the North Vietnamese troops sustained only 10 percent of the total losses. In 1966 the North Vietnamese should account for about one-fourth of total losses. This share may climb as high as 40 percent in 1967.

III. Communist Manpower Requirements

A. Viet Cong

On the basis of data on the build-up of VC military forces since 1961, we estimate that the total military manpower requirement was in the order of 355,000-370,000 men or an average monthly requirement during the period of about 6,000 persons.

This estimate is based on current MACV order of battle holdings. A reappraisal of the strength of Communist irregular forces which is currently underway indicates that MACV estimates of the strength of irregular forces may have understated their growth drastically, probably by as much as 200,000 persons. If this be the case, the build-up of Communist forces during the 1961-65 period would have required recruitment at a monthly rate of 9,000-9,500 persons. These requirements are within the currently estimated Viet Cong capability to recruit and train from 7,000 to 10,000 personnel a month. Additional thousands were recruited during the period to form the VC political/military cadre and combat support units which include from 60,000 to 90,000 persons.

The recruitment burden for the Viet Cong has varied sharply during the period, ranging from at least 40,000 a year during 1961-64 to over 120,000 a year in 1965, the year of their greatest force increase and the year during which estimated manpower losses more than doubled.

1965 also marks a leveling off in the estimated build-up of VC regular forces. Although they will increase only by about 5,000 personnel in 1966 the increasing casualties being sustained by the VC will keep the manpower requirement at about 1965 levels. We estimate that Viet Cong forces will suffer total manpower losses of over 90-100,000 personnel during 1966. This yields a total manpower requirement of from 95-105,000 personnel to be replaced.

To meet a similar requirement in 1965 the VC had to resort to forced conscription and returnee programs but attained a capability to recruit and train some 7,000 to 10,000 personnel a month. Recruitment at this rate is probably close to the maximum capabilities of the VC. Several constraints combine to place this ceiling on VC recruitment capability. Among them are the increasing manpower losses being sustained by Viet Cong forces, the deterioration of VC political control resulting from allied military operations, and an apparent VC requirement to meet at least part of the NVA troop losses in South Vietnam.

All of the VC manpower losses do not represent a true military manpower requirement since a large number of the estimated losses are probably civilians -- either innocent victims of military action or labor engaged in logistic support activities and recruited for short-term

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periods. Some of the manpower losses are undoubtedly compensated by upgrading personnel assigned to irregular units and transferring them to main and local force units.

The most important manpower requirement is to replace the casualties to be sustained during 1966 by VC main and local force units. We estimate that these will be from 35,000-40,000 in 1966. If these regular forces also expand by 5,000 troops during 1966, the manpower requirement for main and local forces alone would be in the order of 3,000-4,000 troops a month.

Replacement at this level is not an onerous quantitative drain on VC manpower resources. Some 30,000 youth annually reach recruitment age in VC controlled areas. The burden is even smaller if the irregular forces total as much as 300,000 persons. The upgrading of irregular forces at the rate of 3,000-4,000 troops a month would probably mean, however, that the VC regular forces will be hard pressed to maintain a high degree of skilled military cadre.

In one of the few captured documents giving meaningful aggregative data on annual recruitment in a VC province, total recruitment in 1965 amounted to 1.5 percent of the total population controlled by the VC. Recruitment specifically for military purposes (including militia and self-defense forces) was just over one percent of the population. Recruitment at this level is undoubtedly far short of the rates needed to meet recruitment targets.* But even recruitment at these low rates would provide nationally from 35,000-50,000 personnel annually, an amount more than sufficient to maintain the force strength of VC main and local force units.

* Some of the recruitment goals are guerillas: 5 percent of the population in lowland areas, 2 percent in cities and towns and 10 percent in highland areas.

B. NVA

In addition to the Viet Cong manpower requirements the NVA forces have been compelled to replace manpower losses ranging from 30,000-35,000 at the same time they were expanding their force levels from an estimated 26,000 at the end of 1965 to an estimated 60,000 at the end of 1966. To meet this requirement the NVA has drastically increased its infiltration of personnel in 1966. Estimated infiltration in 1966 will almost certainly exceed 65,000 persons and could be as high as 95,000*. Infiltration at this rate is adequate to meet the estimated NVA manpower requirements although some small share of this requirement may have to be provided by the Viet Cong if confirmed infiltration does not exceed 65,000 persons.

* These figures are projections based on the current MACV estimate of NVA infiltration in the two categories "accepted" and "possible" through September 1966.

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